

Message Text

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TAGS: PFOR, SREF, AG, SS

SUBJECT: SAHARA: JOURNALISTS OBSERVATIONS ON SAHRAOUI REFUGEES

1. IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFF JULY 1, VISITING AMERICAN JOURNALIST MADE FOLLOWING OBSERVATIONS ABOUT POLISARIO AND SITUATION OF REFUGEES IN WESTERN ALGERIA:

A. THERE ARE NOW 18 SAHRAOUI REFUGEE CAMPS IN ALGERIA WITH CLAIMED POPULATION OF 50,000. CAMPS RUN ENTIRELY BY SAHRAOIS AND FEW ALGERIANS IN EVIDENCE.
B. CONDITIONS IN CAMPS GRAVE. CHILDREN SHOWED SIGNS OF ACUTE UNDERNOURISHMENT AND PERSONS INTERVIEWED SAID THAT CHILD DEATHS, ALTHOUGH NOT AS FREQUENT AS IN PERIOD IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING MOROCCAN OCCUPATION, WERE STILL STEADY, MORE OR LESS DAILY, OCCURRENCE. SANITATION FACILITIES NON-EXISTENT, AND SINCE THERE NO ELECTRICITY, NO POSSIBILITY OF REFRIGERATION. ALTHOUGH SOME TRADITIONAL AND MODERN TENTS IN EVIDENCE, MUCH OF REFUGEE POPULATION LIVING UNDER IMPROVISED SHELTERS MADE OF RAGS. MAJOR FATAL DISEASE AT MOMENT IS MEASLES.

C. SUPPLY OF WATER, FOODSTUFFS AND MEDICINE MAJOR PROBLEM. TRANSPORT IS INADEQUATE AND QUANTITITES OF GOODS BEING DELIVERED INSUFFICIENT TO COVER DAILY NEEDS . WATER IS

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SHORT IN TOWN OF TINDOUF ITSELF, AND ALGERIANS THEREFORE

RELUCTANT TO ALLOW ADEQUATE DELIVERIES TO CAMPS. THIS HAS CAUSED FRICTION WITH SAHRAOUIS. RED CROSS AND OTHER SHIPMENTS OF MEDICINE ARRIVE PERIODICALLY, BUT HIGH PERCENTAGE OF VACCINES GENERALLY GO TO WASTE BECAUSE OF LACK OF REFRIGERATION. "CLINICS" IN CAMPS THEREFORE NOTHING MORE THAN DISPENSARIES FOR ASPIRINS AND OTHER VERY BASIC ITEMS.

C. CAMPS' POPULATION APPEARS LARGEY FROM FORMER SPANISH SAHARA REGION NOT, AS HAS BEEN ASSERTED, FROM OTHER PARTS OF CONTINENT. (JOURNALIST'S REASONING ON THIS POINT WAS THAT EVEN HARD - PRESSED SAHELIAN WOULD NOT AGREE TO LIVE IN SUCH CONDITIONS AND THAT KNOWLEDGE OF SPANISH SEEMED WUITE GENERALIZED IN CAMPS.)

E. AMERICAN-MADE JEEPS, SAID TO BE CAPTURED FROM MOROCCANS, IN EVIDENCE. (JOURNALIST ESTIMATED NUMBER OF THESE VEHICLES AT 20.)

F. VAROUS INHABITANTS OF CAMPS RECOUNTED SAME HORROR STORIES OF MOROCCAN PILLAGE. MURDER AND RAPE THAT HAVE APPEARED IN ALGERIAN PRESS. MOROCCAN PRISONERS INTERVIEWED STRESSED THEIR TOTAL, PRIOR IGNORANCE OF TRUE SITUATION IN SAHARA.

2. JOURNALIST ALSO IMPRESSED BY APPARENT LACK OF ALGERIAN MILITARY PRESENCE IN TINDOUF.

3. COMMENT: WE SEE NO REASON TO DOUBT THAT CONDITIONS IN CAMPS ARE MORE OR LESS AS DESCRIBED BY JOURNALIST. ALGERIAN LOGISTIC CAPABILITIES STRETCHED TO BREAKING POINT IN SUPPLYING THEIR FORCES IN SOUTH, AND PROBABLY NOT MUCH LEFT OVER FOR REFUGEES. LYNE

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